

South Dakota National Guard

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SD Army National Guard names Soldier, NCO of the Year

YANKTON, S.D. – The South Dakota Army National Guard brought four enlisted Soldiers and four non-commissioned officers to Yankton, April 20-22, to compete in the state's Best Warrior Competition, which names the Soldier and Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, respectively.

After the three-day competition, Staff Sgt. Shane Wilkinson, with Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery, was named the 2017 SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year and Spc. Lucas Scott, 842nd Engineer Company, the SDARNG Soldier of the Year.

"The importance of this event is readiness," said State Command Sgt. Maj. James Hoekman, the SDNG's senior enlisted leader. "Everything we do in the National Guard is to support our two missions, which is to have a ready force to engage, fight, and win our nation's wars, and to be ready to perform our state mission when called upon."

Day one of the competition began with a very brief welcome from Hoekman, a quick shakedown and inspection, and competitors were soon taking the Army Physical Fitness Test, comprised of push-ups, sit-ups and a two-mile run.

Following the APFT, Soldiers took an exam on map reading, grid coordinates and terrain association. After handing in their exams, they changed into the Army Service Uniform for an interview board comprised of four command sergeants major, a uniform inspection and a proficiency test on drill and ceremony.

"The competition is rigorous – both physically and intellectually," said Hoekman. "We're bringing back the field craft and the warrior skills that every Soldier should have."

The following day began at dark, with a night land-navigation test, a timed ruck march, and once the sun had risen, a daytime land-navigation course. Various stations followed, designed to test warrior tasks and battle drills, such as the ability to evaluate and treat a casualty, to set up radio communications and request medical evacuation, vehicle maintenance, knowledge and proficiency on various weapons systems and reacting to chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and/or explosive materials.

The third day of the competition included an essay and exam and then command sergeants major complete the final grading and evaluations.

"This year's competition was extremely close," said Hoekman. "The Soldiers were very well prepared. In fact, the Soldier of the Year competition came down to a tiebreaker on an exam. Our competitors maintained the high level of expertise that always has been known in the South Dakota National Guard."

Wilkinson and Scott will move on to the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition next month at Fort Lewis, Washington, where they will represent the SDARNG against Soldiers from Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and North Dakota.

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“It was an honor to even be selected to compete,” said Scott, of Rapid City, who has served in the SDARNG just under three years.

Joining Scott in the Soldier of the Year competition were Spc. Derek Kocer, Company B, 139th Brigade Support Battalion, the 2017 Soldier of the Year runner-up/alternate; Spc. Brianna Bohn, 740th Transportation Company; and Spc. Elijah Houchens, Company C, 189th Aviation Battalion.

“It means a lot to me,” said Wilkinson, a Faulkton native and member of the SDARNG for 19 years. “I trained hard for this; not only for this competition but the brigade-level competition as well.”

Wilkinson’s fellow NCOs in the competition were Sgt. Austin Pearce, 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, the 2017 NCO of the Year runner-up/alternate; Sgt. 1st Class Cindy Erickson, 1st Battalion, 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute); and Staff Sgt. Thomas Wanzek, Joint Force Headquarters.

While Wilkinson and Scott will move on to represent South Dakota in the regional competition, and potentially nationally, it was the year leading up to the competition that ultimately affects the organization as a whole.

“You have to refresh yourself when preparing for a contest like this,” said Wilkinson. “As a result, it will allow me to provide my Soldiers with more quality training.”

“We want all of our competitors to bring the skills back to their respective units and to work with their leadership to continue stressing the importance of training warrior tasks and Soldier skills,” Hoekman said. “This all comes back to readiness.”

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High-resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



170408-Z- FO377--007: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Shane Wilkinson, with Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery, South Dakota Army National Guard, is named the 2017 SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, April 22, 2017, in Yankton, S.D. Wilkinson, receiving the award from State Command Sgt. Maj. James Hoekman, will represent South Dakota at the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition at Fort Lewis, Washington in May. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170408-Z- FO377--014: The South Dakota National Guard Best Warrior Competition concluded April 22, 2017, in Yankton, S.D. The three-day competition determines the SDARNG Soldier of the Year and Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. Pictured, is State Command Sgt. Maj. James Hoekman, center, the SDNG senior enlisted leader, along with the 2017 competitors, left to right, for Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year: Sgt. 1st Class Cindy Erickson, 1st Battalion, 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute); Staff Sgt. Shane Wilkinson, Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery; Sgt. Austin Pearce, 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment; and Staff Sgt. Thomas Wanzek, Joint Force Headquarters. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170408-Z- FO377-004: U.S. Army Spc. Lucas Scott, left, 842nd Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, is named the 2017 SDARNG Soldier of the Year, April 22, 2017, in Yankton, S.D. Scott, receiving the award from State Command Sgt. Maj. James Hoekman, will represent South Dakota at the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition at Fort Lewis, Washington in May. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170408-Z- FO377-017: The South Dakota National Guard Best Warrior Competition concluded April 22, 2017, in Yankton, S.D. The three-day competition determines the SDARNG Soldier of the Year and Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. Pictured, is State Command Sgt. Maj. James Hoekman, center, the SDNG senior enlisted leader, along with the 2017 competitors, left to right, for Soldier of the Year: Spc. Brianna Bohn, 740th Transportation Company; Spc. Lucas Scott, 842nd Engineer Company; Spc. Derek Kocer, Company B, 139th Brigade Support Battalion; and Spc. Elijah Houchens, Company C, 189th Aviation Battalion. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170420-Z-FO377-037: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Shane Wilkinson, of Faulkton, S.D., a member of Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery, South Dakota Army National Guard, conducts the Army Physical Fitness Test during the South Dakota Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition in Yankton, S.D., April 20, 2017. At the conclusion of the three-day competition, Wilkinson was named the SDARNG NCO of the Year and will move on to represent the SDARNG at the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition at Fort Lewis, Washington in May. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170420-Z- FO377-055: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Shane Wilkinson, of Faulkton, S.D., a member of Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery, South Dakota Army National Guard, takes an exam on map reading during the South Dakota Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition in Yankton, S.D., April 20, 2017. At the conclusion of the three-day competition, Wilkinson was named the SDARNG NCO of the Year and will move on to represent the SDARNG at the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition at Fort Lewis, Washington in May. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170420-Z-FO377-067: U.S. Army Spc. Derek Kocer, of Alexandria, S.D., a member of Company B, 139th Brigade Support Battalion, South Dakota Army National Guard, sits before a review board of command sergeants major during the South Dakota Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition in Yankton, S.D., April 20, 2017. At the conclusion of the three-day competition, Kocer was named the runner-up/alternate in the SDARNG Soldier of the Year category. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170421-Z-FO377-007: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Thomas Wanzek, of Sturgis, S.D., a member of Joint Force Headquarters, South Dakota Army National Guard, competes in the ruck march, one of many events during the SDARNG Best Warrior Competition in Yankton, S.D., April 21, 2017. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170421-Z-FO377-118: U.S. Army Spc. Elijah Houchens, of Vermillion, S.D., a member of Company C, 189th Aviation Battalion, South Dakota Army National Guard, puts on protective equipment during a scenario testing knowledge and response to an incident involving chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and/or explosive materials during the SDARNG Best Warrior Competition in Yankton, S.D., April 21, 2017. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170421-Z-FO377-180: U.S. Army Spc. Brianna Bohn, of Brookings, S.D., a member of 740th Transportation Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, disassembles an M9 mm pistol at a station testing knowledge on various weapons at the SDARNG Best Warrior Competition in Yankton, S.D., April 21, 2017. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170421-Z-FO377-100: U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Cindy Erickson, of Sturgis, S.D., a member of 1st Battalion, 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), South Dakota Army National Guard, calls for a medical evacuation during a scenario designed to test knowledge and use of communication equipment at the SDARNG Best Warrior Competition in Yankton, S.D., April 21, 2017. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170421-Z-FO377-074: U.S. Army Spc. Lucas Scott, of Rapid City, S.D., a member of the 842nd Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, goes through a training scenario to test marksmanship knowledge and skill during the SDARNG Best Warrior Competition in Yankton, S.D., April 21, 2017. At the conclusion of the three-day competition, Scott was named the SDARNG Soldier of the Year and will move on to represent the SDARNG at the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition at Fort Lewis, Washington in May. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170421-Z-FO377-146: U.S. Army Sgt. Austin Pearce, of Rapid City, S.D., a member of the 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, South Dakota Army National Guard, evaluates and treats a casualty during a medical scenario at the SDARNG Best Warrior Competition in Yankton, S.D., April 21, 2017. At the conclusion of the three-day competition, Pearce was named the runner-up/alternate in the SDARNG NCO of the Year category. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)

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